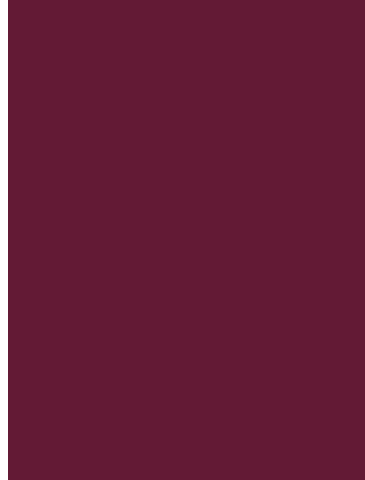




Alone by [tellmewhatisreal](#)

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Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Will B.

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Summary: El is having an off day.

Alone

She was lying in her bed, listening to distant sound of rain hitting the roof. She wished she had a window in her room; then she would've had something to stare at other than the wall. She had woken up a while ago, but hadn't been able to muster enough energy to get up. She wondered where the heavy feeling in her chest had come from. Nothing bad had happened. The previous day had been fun, even: Hop had taken her outside and shown her how to throw and catch a baseball. The sunlight had filtered through the trees and felt warm and comforting on her face. But that felt like a very distant memory now.

There was a knock on her door. "Hey kid, it's time to get up. I made oatmeal, your absolute favorite," he called from the other side of the door.

"No." Then she remembered what she had been told about politeness. "No thank you," she added. She squeezed her eyes shut, hoping he would let her be.

"Everything okay?" he inquired through the door after a moment of silence.

"I want to be alone," she replied gently, and finally she heard his retreating footsteps.

The crushing feeling in her chest intensified. She didn't want to be rude to him, but she couldn't understand what she was feeling, so she certainly wouldn't be able to put it in words for him. For a fleeting moment she even hoped she was in the woods on her own, without anyone expecting anything from her. She rolled onto her back to stare at the ceiling for a change and dozed off into a restless sleep.

She woke with a start and rubbed at her eyes with the heels of her hands, but then a flash of color caught her eye and she remembered she needed to be careful. Moving her watch out of the way, she looked at her left wrist. Two days ago, when the boys had come to visit, she had asked Will to draw something pretty over the number tattoo she downright hated these days. The weather had gotten so

warm that she hadn't been able to cover it with long sleeves anymore. He had used black, dark blue and orange markers to draw a beautiful bird. She had looked at it in awe and thanked him with tears in her eyes. "It's perfect," she'd told him and he had smiled.

Whenever Will was around, she got the feeling that they understood each other a bit better than the others did. All of her friends made her feel better in so many ways, of course. Dustin and Lucas made her laugh and Mike always made sure she was feeling okay. But she and Will shared a kind of sadness, the kind that was crushing her chest right now. It was a sadness that they saw in each other's eyes, and it never completely went away. They had both experienced so much evil that it was always lurking somewhere in the backs of their minds. When they were together, they didn't need to pretend it wasn't there. It was comforting.

She traced the drawing with her finger. Even though she had been careful not to wash it out, it had begun to fade. The 011 was slightly visible through the ink. She got up and moved to sit down at the desk. She looked for the black marker from among the clutter of books, notebooks and pencils. On the page of an open book she noticed the word she had underlined the night before. She had been meaning to look it up from the dictionary when Hop had told her to go to bed. *'Irate'*. She had never heard anyone use it before. She looked up the word and memorized it. She then tried to read the book further, but there were too many hard words and she didn't feel like she could memorize all of them, so she closed the book with a sigh and tossed it aside, a few pencils rolling to the floor in the process. She spotted the cap of the black marker under a notebook and started to color over the number on her wrist, careful not to color over the lines. Happy with the result, she wiggled her wrist so that the ink would dry.

Although she still didn't feel like talking to anyone, her stomach was starting to growl painfully and she also needed to pee. Mentally preparing herself for questions, she opened the door and stepped out quietly. He was lying on the couch, reading the newspaper. He paid no attention to her, so she shuffled to the bathroom and then to the kitchen, only to discover there was nothing else to eat than the oatmeal that had been sitting there for a while. Making a face, she

grabbed a spoon, moved the pot to the table and started scooping spoonfuls of the sticky stuff, not even bothering with a plate. It wasn't good, but she'd had worse. She glanced at the couch. She only saw the newspaper from behind the back of the couch. He still hadn't said anything. She started to feel that unpleasant feeling in her chest again, wondering if he was angry at her.

"I'm sorry if I made you irate," she said after a while, mispronouncing the latest addition to her vocabulary.

The newspaper disappeared from sight and he sat up. "Made me what?"

Judging by his confused frown, she figured either he didn't know the word or she hadn't used it correctly. "I-r-a-t-e," she repeated unsurely. "It means angry."

"Oh, *irate*," he corrected her pronunciation. "Fancy word. But why do you think I'm angry?"

"Because I wanted to be alone and didn't come to breakfast," she said, more as a question than a statement.

"And why would I be angry about that?"

She just shrugged and scraped the last of the oatmeal off the pot.

"I'm not angry. If you feel like being alone, you have every right to be alone. You don't need to humor me." He flopped back down on the couch. "But if you do feel like talking about something, you can do that too. No pressure though," he added and went back to his newspaper.

She smiled to herself and took the pot to the sink to wash it. She looked out of the window and noticed that the rain had stopped. She also noticed that the feeling in her chest had let up a bit, and she felt more like herself again.

"Can we practice baseball again today?"

"Sure. You just need to find the ball first. I tried to look for it after your record-breaking throw yesterday, but came up empty. One

might say that playing catch in the woods wasn't such a bright idea."

"Oh, I can find anything," she said smugly.